



MONTANA DNRC Conversation



A tail of two horses

Meet employee Heidi Olbert

Fire it up

Biomass conference coming next week

Cushion change not applicable

CARDD awards \$17 mil. in two months

Special Section

DNRC Employee awards list

Trust Land completes purchase of Tongue River Ranch

In April 2007, the DNRC, Real Estate Management Bureau, Ag and Grazing Bureau and the Eastern Land Office completed the purchase of the Tongue River Ranch (TRR) through the DNRC Land Banking Program.

Through the purchase of this "working ranch" the Trust Land Division will be implementing a number of goals and objectives of the Land Banking Program. Trust land will be increasing public access, consolidating trust land ownership (consequently reducing administrative costs) and increasing overall revenue to the School Trust.

The TRR is comprised of 18,544 acres (new-purchased) state Trust Land, 640 acres existing state Trust Land and 1,100 acres of BLM administered land within the ranch boundaries. Of this acreage 382 acres is considered agricultural (pivot and flood irrigated cropland with 20 to 40 acres of dry land cropland). The balance of the ranch acreage is grazing land.

Currently the TRR leases, (agricultural, grazing and home-site) will provide \$80,385 revenues to the DNRC School Trust fund yearly. As the TRR is in reasonably close proximity to the ELO administrative site the purchase will save the ELO Trust Land Management staff thousands miles of travel and significant hours of travel time in field lease management operations.

With the purchase of the TRR nearly 83 sec-



From left, Dan Hare of Pheasants Forever, Kathy Bramer, OPI Land Board, Tom Schultz and Jeanne Holmgren, TLMD, Mary Sexton, DNRC, and Joe Duggan, executive director of Pheasants Forever – partners on Tongue River Ranch.

tions or 53,136 acres are part of one continuous habitat block of ownership through conservation easements (private land ownership) and now Trust Land management for the future. This block of conservation easements and newly acquired Trust Land also provides for 31 continuous miles of eastern Montana Tongue River frontage.

The TRR was purchased with assistance from the "Pheasants Forever" (PF) non-profit organization as a partner. On June 14, 2007 the purchase assistance from the PF organization was recognized by the DNRC at "Tongue River Recognition Day" that was an effort to recognize the various organizations that assisted the DNRC in the TRR purchase.

While there has been much work done by a number of DNRC employees to get the TRR purchase to this point the work associated with realignment of this previously privately-owned property into a Trust Land management configuration is just beginning for the local ELO / TLD staff. Considerable efforts are being made towards: travel plan development and management, recreation access development and management, agriculture and grazing land plan development and management. If your travels bring you to Miles City please stop by the ELO and visit with the local staff regarding how the development is progressing.

FROM THE DIRECTOR

Hot Times

It's been a long, hot, busy summer. With low stream flows, record high temperatures, and a lot of wildland fires, we're all ready for fall. Many of you have been dealing with extreme conditions this summer as part of your jobs at DNRC.

I sincerely thank you for your extra effort and dedication.

Your help during times of need whether as business manager, dam engineer, or engine crew member is appreciated by the citizens of Montana. On an almost daily basis, I get calls from people who recognize you and your contribution – with thanks and accolades.

As the busy season slows a bit – at least it's supposed to, I hope you can take some time to hunt in your favorite spot, take a hike on your favorite trail, or just sit in your backyard and relax. Thank you again for all that you do for Montana's land and water resources!

Mary



DNRC Conversation is an employee newsletter published quarterly by the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation. Please send news articles or ideas for articles to your division liaison or to any member of the Editorial Board.

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A tail of two horses: meet CARDD's Heidi Olbert

by John Grassy

Heidi Olbert is horse crazy. When she's not working as the DNRC Rangeland Resource Program Coordinator, Heidi is spending time with River and Josie. She's digging dirt out of their hooves or she's training them. She's brushing, saddling and unsaddling them, and brushing them again. She's giving them alfalfa treats and talking to them. And she's riding them: indoors and outdoors, in parades, on trails, behind cattle, in competitive events. Like all of the most devoted equestrians, Heidi Olbert doesn't merely "own" or "keep" horses: she's in a long-term partnership with them.



DNRC Rangeland Resource Program Coordinator Heidi Olbert with her horses River, left, and Josie.

On a mild, breezy evening in the Helena Valley, Heidi's mares – "the girls," she calls them – come right over to get acquainted with me. Heidi is pulling out saddles and bridles from the tack room in the barn, and both horses understand there's fun in the

works. Josie is the shorter and stockier of the two, sorrel in color with a big white patch on her face. She's a "mutt," Heidi says, one-quarter Welsh, one-quarter Percheron and one-half Paint. In personality, Josie is an extrovert. Once she realizes I'm willing to scratch her head – and scratch *really* hard – she is up against the wooden fence with her head lowered onto my chest. "Josie will jump right in your lap," Heidi says, laughing. The other mare, River, is just as curious and seems friendly, but she doesn't compete with her stable mate for face time – she's happy just standing there, getting one or two scratches to every nineteen for Josie.

Horses, ranching, and rural life figure prominently in Heidi Olbert's world, both in and out of the office. Prior to joining the DNRC in 2006, Olbert held jobs with the Montana State University Extension Service and the Natural Resource Conservation Service, *Continued on back page*

CARDD completes loans and grants totaling over \$17 million in two months

Did you know that between July 1st and Aug 31st the DNRC CARDD (Conservation and Resource Development Division) has completed grant contracts for 87 projects, totaling over \$6.2 million? And has completed loans for 12 projects totaling almost \$11 million?

Examples of grants and loans completed since July 1st of this year are:

Administration and technical assistance grants were awarded to Conservation Districts to assist them in their efforts to conserve water, soil and other renewable resources. Watershed Assistance grants were given to assist watershed groups and Conservation Districts formulate plans for their watersheds. Grants were awarded to the Yellowstone Conservation District River Council and the Missouri River Conservation District Council to address conservation issues on these vital Montana rivers.

Renewable Resource (RR) Grants, were made to communities like Bynum, and will assist them in finding a viable water source for their community. Petrolia Irrigation District will use their RR grant to assist them in conserving water by lining their ditches.

RR planning grants have been awarded to communities such as Manhattan for a Capital Improvements Plan and Bozeman for a source water protection study.

Reclamation and Development Grants (RDG) have been awarded to Meagher County CD to study the interaction between groundwater and surface water in the Smith River watershed. Other RD grants are used to plug and abandon oil wells. RDG planning grants have been awarded to Butte-Silver Bow local government for planning for growth impacts due to mining and to Missoula County for reclamation planning for the Mattie V Creek Mine.

The State Revolving Loan program has provided low-interest loans to eight communities for infrastructure improvements. Communities benefiting from these loans include: \$88,000 for Dodson to rehabilitate its wastewater system; \$3 million to Havre to lay new water/wastewater and storm sewer lining under the reconstruction of Highway 2, and the Big Sky Water and Sewer District borrowed \$5 million to rehabilitate their water system.

What does this mean to you as a Montanan? Grant and loan money is being spent

in Montana to assure that good clean water is available to drink; that grant and loan money is being spent in Montana to plan for growth; that grant and loan money is being spent in Montana on the restoration of resources; and that in just 8 weeks over \$16 million has been well spent in assisting Montanans to be good stewards for the Last Best Place.

UPCOMING DATES OF INTEREST

September

| | |
|---------------|---------------------------|
| 20 | Governor's Rangeland Tour |
| 21 | Yom Kippur |
| Sept 22-Oct 7 | Oktoberfest |
| 23 | Autumn Equinox |

October

| | |
|-------|------------------------|
| 8 | Columbus Day |
| 16-18 | FFS&B Workshop |
| 17-18 | Large Lakes Conference |
| 31 | Halloween |

November

| | |
|----|-----------------------|
| 4 | Daylight Savings Ends |
| 6 | Election Day |
| 11 | Veterans Day |
| 22 | Thanksgiving |

Fuels for Schools ignites interest in use of woody biomass

The Fuels for Schools and Beyond (FFS&B) program is currently moving out of its financial assistance role, we are seeking to promote the “wood to energy” concept to the private sector. With that, we are co-sponsoring Making Wood Work: Local Energy Solutions – A National Workshop on Implementing Biomass Boiler Systems to be held October 16-18, 2007 in Missoula.

This workshop will share lessons learned from FFS&B projects and partners across the nation with the goal of empowering organizations, communities, and facilities to make woody biomass energy work for them. Topics covered include project feasibility and implementation, combustion technologies, fuel supply issues, environmental considerations, state and federal policies and incentives, and financing opportunities.

Energy and climate change are global concerns and these issues don't escape us locally here in Montana. Beyond livelihoods, aesthetics, and recreation, Montana offers a number of renewable energy resources including solar, wind, hydropower, and biomass. As our state and nation looks to diversify our energy portfolios, the potential for woody biomass is igniting quite a stir and one DNRC program continues to carry the flame. FFS&B has been a leader in woody biomass energy projects throughout Montana, collaborating with local architects, engineers, foresters, and facilities to implement seven biomass boiler systems across the state with more on the horizon.

FFS&B is an innovative program designed to promote healthy communities and forests by encouraging facilities to utilize woody biomass waste from forest management treatments as a fuel source for heating, cooling and power generation. Managed by the DNRC Forestry Assistance Bureau, the



The heater pictured left was installed in the Darby school. It uses woody biomass (bottom) gathered from fuel hazard reduction projects. Woody biomass makes it possible to heat schools across the nation.



FFS&B program provides technical and financial assistance to facilities and involves a partnership between the USDA Forest Service's Northern and Intermountain State & Private Forestry Division, the state forestry divisions of Montana, North Dakota, Idaho, Nevada, Utah and Wyoming, and the Bitterroot RC&D.

FFS&B's pilot project was a biomass boiler installation at a school campus in Darby, Montana, which fired up in the fall of 2003 and has since enjoyed fuel savings of up to \$90,000/year while using material from local fuel reduction treatments. Ten additional Montana schools have received Fuels for Schools grants for biomass boiler installations. The most recently completed projects include installations at the UM Western-Dillon campus, the new Glacier High School in Kalispell, and an “all-tree” pellet system retrofit at Townsend Schools. These “all-tree” pellets are composed of whole tree material from logging residues (branches, tops, bark, and bole wood) manufactured by Eureka Pellet Mills. With all 11 Montana projects complete, a total of nearly 11,000 tons of wood chips will be utilized annually, which is roughly

the amount of waste produced from thinning about 1,000 acres.

With federal funding for the Fuels for Schools program waning, we were overjoyed with the support shown by the Montana Legislature which appropriated funds to the Biomass Utilization and FFS&B programs for FY 2008 and FY 2009. This funding allows the program to continue support to existing projects and in providing technical assistance and knowledge sharing to those in the private and public sectors. We will also continue to work with our partners on improving efficiencies of supply infrastructure, advancing local and national policies in biomass utilization, and ensuring the viability of the state's forests and communities.

Field tours of operating biomass boilers, new forest management technologies and exhibits will also be given.

Thumbs Up, Thumbs Down



Thumbs down to the hot and dry weather in July and August which contributed to a statewide drought and fire season.



Thumbs up to the legislature for providing additional funding for the 2007 and 2008 fire seasons during the special session called on September 4.



Thumbs Up! At DNRC headquarters in Helena, the Oil and Gas Division recently remodeled their offices and

worked with Centralized Services Division to create a new conference room in the basement. Formerly a storage area for the IT Bureau, the new room has been named the Bakken Conference Room, after the Bakken Formation - the major source of the oil boom in the Richland County area of Montana.



Thumbs Up! The 2007 Legislature granted all state employees a 3.0% raise each year of the biennium. .6%

each year goes toward such things as move to market, pay performance, etc. DNRC Leadership has chosen to award all employees a 3.3% increase the first year, making .3% available for paragon of performance awards. No decisions have been made regarding the second year of the biennium.

Tail, continued from page 2

where she worked as a soil conservation technician. In her position with DNRC, Olbert coordinates the annual Governor's Rangeland Tour, the Montana Youth Range Camp, and the State Winter Grazing Seminar, working with the conservation districts that host those events. "I love this job," Olbert says. "The best thing about it is the people I work with, here in Helena and out on the road. I work with conservation districts all over the state. And the ranchers – they're the best folks."

Olbert grew up in Durango and Glenwood Springs, Colo., where her love for horses took off running. As a range science major at Montana State University, she enrolled in every class offered on starting and training colts. "For those classes you're given a colt to work with," she says. "I also learned a lot from all of my friends." The coursework, she says, hardly seemed like work at all. Time spent training and riding blended with friendships and socializing at the arena. Today those relationships enhance the work Heidi does with DNRC, as many of her friends have gone on to jobs in agriculture and conservation, a close-knit community that stretches across the state.

The girls are coming out of the corral. Josie is on a lead rope held by Heidi, while River, without any prompting, just follows along on her own. We walk over to a hitching post where I'm given a brush and shown how to use it on River, the horse I'll be riding. The older of the two mares, River is a big gal at 16.2 hands. A registered Quarter horse bred to go fast, she's so gentle and composed that Heidi just drapes the lead rope over the hitching post – there's no need to tie her up. The same cannot be said for Josie, who is young and given to mischief. "She'll push your buttons every chance she gets," Heidi says. "She used to blow bubbles in her water tank when she was young, and I know she was doing it on purpose." Josie is tied right down near the wooden crossbar and immediately begins looking for a way to get her teeth on the rope.

Heidi acquired both horses when she lived in Culbertson and worked for the NRCS, her first job out of college. Josie

was purchased in a bar for \$200. "There was a man in the area who was selling all of his horses, he was going to work on a fishing boat in Alaska," Olbert says. "He knew I liked this yearling a lot and he knew I'd give her a good home." Heidi has done most all of the starting and training work with Josie as a colt. She's five years old now and doing well in her lessons, though Heidi says she's still a work in progress.

River was six when Heidi bought her. The mare was smart and responsive; best of all, she had speed to burn. "River and I used to chase deer in Culbertson," Heidi says. "She's so willing. She likes to have a job." River and Heidi also did some barrel racing in Culbertson. Since moving to Helena, Olbert has joined the Helena Team Penners, and rides River in competitions through the year. In team penning, three riders must cut out three cows from a larger group and move them into a corral. The cows to be penned are marked beforehand and released back into the milling herd; riders have a set amount of time to pick out the cows, separate them and get them into the pen. "There's a lot more to it than I ever imagined," Heidi says. The best part, she adds, is spending time "with a ton of other people as horse crazy as me." During the winter, the Helena Team Penners practice at the indoor arena at the Lewis and Clark County Fairgrounds.

Heading to a large fenced arena for a riding lesson, I'm a little uneasy about being atop a horse experienced in the pursuit of deer. As we make our first circuit, Heidi explains the basics of holding the reins, positioning my feet, distributing my weight. I've ridden a handful of times over the years, but never on a horse owned and trained and loved and ridden every day by the same person. The difference is astonishing. River is not some narcoleptic plug in a stable of tourist mounts. She's alert and happy, head high, ears forward; and she's utterly responsive, reacting immediately to the slightest movement of the reins, even the cues I give her by mistake.

Heidi is in the lead giving me final instructions as we get ready to trot. "Just press your legs against her sides. See? She's getting excited, she wants to go." The first few rounds aren't pretty and I have to

contend with a steady stream of reminders from Heidi (*hold the reins looser, keep your heels down, don't put your legs back, put more weight in the stirrups ...*). It hardly seems to matter to River. She'll walk, trot, circle left and right, and back up. She's patient and forgiving, a wonderful horse. After a while I'm trotting her up and down the length of the arena without reaching for the saddle horn.

Right near the end of the evening, as we come out of a turn, I can't resist the idea of going a little faster. I press my legs into her sides and say *let's go*. River's busy, up-and-down trot becomes a fluid stride as she stretches into a lope. It's exhilarating and a little scary. It's better than any ride at any amusement park. It's horseback riding. Hey – is this the first step in becoming horse crazy?

Large Lakes Conference Oct. 17, 18, 19 in Polson

A first-of-its-kind conference next month will examine issues related to protecting water quality in large lake systems of the West and Canada.

The Large Lakes Conference, set for Oct. 17-18 in Polson, will bring together a broad spectrum of stakeholders and representatives of state, county, local and tribal governments, along with non-government organizations and Canadian officials from the provinces of British Columbia and Alberta.

Scheduled speakers and panelists will discuss growth and water quality concerns associated with Lake Tahoe, Lake Pend Oreille, Flathead Lake, Oregon's Upper Klamath Lake and Bear Lake, among others. Montana Governor Brian Schweitzer is tentatively scheduled for a morning meeting with attendees on Oct. 18.

DNRC Water Management Bureau Chief Rich Moy, who also chairs the Flathead Basin Commission, will join other Flathead Lake stakeholders in offering introductory remarks.



Visit DNRC's website
www.dnrc.mt.gov

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Remaining fiscal year 2007 employee awards announced

The following awards were announced during awards sessions throughout the divisions. Awards from Forestry and Trust Land Division in Missoula and Kalispell were announced in the Summer 2007 DNRConversation.

Director's Awards:

To the Water Resources Education team for creating an Applied Science Degree at the Helena College of Technology.

Carol Brown
Jim Gilman
Mike Mikota
Terri McLaughlin
Robin Shropshire

IT Bureau For keeping the agency servers operating securely and efficiently.

Ted Joern
Todd Magill
Milt Popovich
Susan Rose
Carolyn Wolf

Paragon of Performance

Chuck Barone
Jeff Bollman
Martha Hodder
Jane Markland
Kellye Metzenberg
Richard Moore
Chris Pileski
John Raisler
Randy Sanders
Pete Seigmund
Curt Tesmer
Jan Wheeler
Steve Wilkins

POP Line Officer Duty

Hoyt Richard
Clive Rooney

Certificates of Appreciation

Kathy Arndt
Jeff Bollman
Jim Domino
Brian Grant
Anne Moran
Nancy Hughes

Three Creeks Timber Sale

Kristen Baker
Ross Baty
Margaret Beck
Jim Bower
Allen Branine
David Groeschl
Wanemah Hulett
Jaren Jorgenson

Tony Nelson
Sarah Pierce
Dan Roberson
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Land Banking Team

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Tony Liane
Joyce Nacher
Chris Pileski
Patrick Rennie
Hoyt Richards
Clive Rooney
Tricia Schiltz
Rick Strohmeyer
Garry Williams

CSD Special Appreciation

Rick Bush
Tricia Schiltz

Division Administrator Awards:

CSD, Patty Greene
Forestry, John Pilsworth
Trust, Bob Sandman
Water, Susan Russell

Staff Support of the Year

Stephanie Kellogg

Land Use Specialist of the Year

Dave Mousel

NWLO Excellence Award

Aaron King

NWLO Administration Award

Anne Moran

NWLO Business Manager's Award

Lea Taylor

NWLO Trust Manager's Award

Ted Joern

NWLO Area Manager's Award

Marc Vessar

NWLO Unit Manager's Award

Anne Moran

SWLO Administration Award

Cindy Super

SWLO Lands Award

Steve Wallace

Longevity Awards

35 years

James Haslip

30 years

Garry Williams

25 years

Darrell Bakken
Tim Hall
Dave Roberts

20 years

Bill Greiman
Jeanine Markle
Steve Sasaki
Pam Smith
Bill Uthman

15 years

Jeff Beaver
Lance Bouche
Carol Brown
Butch Kroll
Dave Martin
David Mousel
Clive Rooney
Jeff Williams

10 Years

Connie Daruk
Steve Dobson
George Hudak
Darell Hystad
Nancy Lausch
Thomas Schultz
Lorene Thorson

5 years

Ryan Abraham
Timothy Crosmer
Jolyn Eggart
Kelly Gilberston
William Halvorson
Ann Kulczyk
Neil Kunz
Dennis Meyer
Shawn Morgan
Scott Moore
Robert Moorehead
Raymond Radcliffe
Becky Shepard
Marcus Sherburn
Frank Sherman
Christine Smith
Stephen Tappe
Blaine Verbanac
Arne Wick